What About Halloween?

To understand Halloween, it is important to understand its history. “All Hallows Eve” stems directly from Irish, Scottish, Welsh and British folk customs. It was celebrated as the autumn festival of an order of Celtic priests who worshiped nature instead of the God who created it. These priests, called Druids, were accomplished magicians and wizards who were at the height of their influence some 200 years before the birth of Jesus.

This holiday was originally celebrated on October 31 to honor a false god named Samhain, who was known as the “lord of the dead.” The Druids only observed two seasons of the year: summer and winter. October 31 was the end of the summer, including the time of harvest. It was followed by the beginning of winter—the cold, dark season when nothing grew and the incidences of sickness and death typically increased. Because the Druids closely observed and worshiped nature, this time of the year symbolized death to them. They believed on this date, Samhain called all the wicked souls who had died within the last year and been condemned to live in animal bodies, to be released in the form of spirits, ghosts, fairies, witches and elves. According to the tradition of the Druids, these souls of the dead were allowed to roam on this one night and return to haunt the homes where they once lived.

The phrase “trick or treat” grew out of this tradition. Current occupants of the house could only free themselves from being haunted by laying out food and giving shelter to the spirit during the night. If they didn’t, the spirit would cast a spell on them. In other words, they would be tricked if they didn’t lay out a treat.

The jack-o’-lantern was also a part of this belief system. The carved pumpkin symbolized a damned soul named Jack. According to the tale, Jack was not allowed in to heaven or hell. So, he wandered around in the darkness with his lantern until Judgment Day. Fearful people hollowed out turnips (and later, pumpkins, in the United States), carved an evil face on them, and lit a candle inside to scare Jack and other evil spirits away.

The Druids had other outlandish beliefs which have since turned into tradition. For example, they were afraid of black cats because they believed that when a person committed evil, he would be turned into one. Black cats were thus considered evil. To scare them away, the Druids decorated their homes with witches, ghosts and the like. They also decorated with cornstalks, pumpkins and other goods in offerings of thanks and praise to their gods.

October 31 had additional significance to the Celts and Anglo-Saxons, besides honoring Samhain. It was also their New Year’s Eve. To celebrate, they built huge bonfires on hilltops to frighten away evil spirits, and often offered their crops and animals to the evil ones as a sacrifice—sometimes even offering themselves or others.

When the Romans began their conquest of the Celts around A.D. 43, eventually ruling much of what is now the United Kingdom, two Roman fall festivals were incorporated into the Celtic festival of Samhain. The first, called Feralia, was held in late October to honor the dead. The second festival honored Pomona, Roman goddess of fruit and trees, whose symbol was an apple. The practice of
bobbing for apples became associated with Halloween because of this festival.

Although many Halloween traditions began with the Druids, the name Halloween came from a Roman Catholic Church observance. For this reason, some people have thought Halloween’s only significance was as the evening before All Saints’ Day, a festival of the Roman Catholic Church honoring all Christian saints. Mass said on All Saints’ Day was called Allhallowmas. The evening before became known as the Eve of All Saints, Eve of All Hallows, All Hallows’ Eve, or Hallow Even, eventually shortened to Hallowe’en.

Although All Saints’ Day contributed to the naming of Halloween, All Saints’ Day itself did not exist until A.D. 700 when it was instituted by Pope Boniface IV. Originally, it was celebrated in the spring on the first Sunday after Pentecost. Its date was changed to November 1 by Pope Gregory III (reigned A.D. 731-741), in an attempt to add a Christian influence to the traditional pagan customs still being celebrated on October 31, by Celtic converts. When sending missionaries to convert native peoples, the Catholic Church encouraged the redefinition of local customs into Christian terms and concepts. Because All Saints’ Day and Halloween both involved reverencing the dead, they were unified. The combination of these customs eventually became the traditional celebration we call Halloween.

It is important for parents to consider these “harmless gestures of enjoyment” and the distorted images they make in a child’s heart. We must realize Halloween is a holiday centered on fear and death. Modern-day witches and wizards believe Halloween night to be the most suitable night of the year for magic and demonic activity. In Deuteronomy 18:10-11, God forbids us to participate in any kind of occult practices or witchcraft. Further, in the New Testament, we are told to abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

As Christians, we should not celebrate Halloween, rather we should recognize October 31 as a day the Lord has made—a day we can rejoice in (Psalm 118:24). We are not to be fearful, for God has not given us a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7).

Parents should teach their children faith in God. Children can have just as much fun on a Halloween centered on the Word of God and family or church fellowship. Make a commitment today to give your children the Word of God instead of the fairy tales and pagan customs the world offers. Help them grow in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Here is a prayer of safety you can pray over your family on Halloween:

Father, in the Name of Jesus, I thank You that You watch over Your Word to perform it. I thank You that my family and I dwell in the secret place of the Most High and we remain stable and fixed under the shadow of the Almighty, whose power no foe can withstand.

Father, You are our refuge and our fortress. No evil shall befall us—no accident shall overtake us—nor any plague or calamity come near our home. You give Your angels special charge over each of us, to accompany and defend and preserve us in all our ways of obedience and service. Your angels are encamped around about us.

Lord, I will train my children in the way they should go, and according to Your Word, when they are old, they will not depart from it. I bind the devil from trying to influence my children in any way this holiday.

Father, You are our confidence, firm and strong. You keep our feet from being caught in a trap or hidden danger. When we lie down, You will give us peaceful sleep. Father, thank You for giving this family safety and easing us—Jesus is our safety!

Prayer References: Jeremiah 1:12; Psalm 91:1-2, 10-11 (The Amplified Bible); Psalm 34:7;
Proverbs 22:6; Psalm 112:7 *(The Amplified Bible); Proverbs 3:26 (The Amplified Bible); Proverbs 3:23-24; Isaiah 26:3; Psalm 3:5, 4:8, 127:2, 149:5; Isaiah 49:25 *(The Amplified Bible)*

Information for this brochure was taken from several sources, including books and encyclopedias easily found at your local library.